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**Testimony Before the General Law Committee
February 28, 2019**

Proposed SB 647

AN ACT STREAMLINING THE LIQUOR CONTROL ACT

Good afternoon and thank you to the members of the General Law Committee for holding today's hearing. In particular, I'd like to thank Co-chairs Fonfara and D'Agostino, as well as Ranking Members Cheeseman and Witkos for leading today's discussions.

My name is Dan Meiser, and I'm here today representing the CT Restaurant Association (CRA) where I currently serve as Chairman of the Board. The CRA works on behalf of our 155,000 CT Workers, representing just over 10% of the States workforce, and nearly 8000 small businesses based here in CT. Restaurants generate tremendous tax revenue in Connecticut.

The CRA is here today for 2 main reasons;

- 1) To show support for portions of SB 647, which look to clarify and streamline the Liquor Control Act and in particular the number and types of available permits
- 2) To ensure that the General Law Committee and the Connecticut General Assembly knows that the CRA stands in favor of a reasonable and fair 3 Tier System, and will continue to work to clarify and maintain the distinctions between Manufacturer, Distributor and Retailer.

15 years ago, I started off in the restaurant industry as a prep cook at Trumbull Kitchen right here in Hartford. I now own 3 nationally recognized "farm to table" restaurants in Mystic and we proudly employ 200 local area residents. My wife and I are also co-owners of a 63-acre farm, where we grow year round for the restaurants, supply a 200 member CSA, and have an onsite farmers market. Last year, our restaurants purchased just north of \$1million worth of locally made CT products from CT farmers, fisherman, artisans, vineyards and breweries. We are the gold standard in CT for supporting local businesses and the local food movement. As a restaurateur in the states largest tourism destination of Mystic, I understand as well as anyone, the importance of a strong tourist economy, and having businesses that can attract folks to our state. As a young entrepreneur, I also understand what it means to open a business, take the risk, borrow the money, and make the decisions that hopefully nurture and grow a small business.

At the CRA, we support small business, we support entrepreneurialism and we support our friends in CT's craft beer industry. As we speak, the draft lines at all 3 of my restaurants and hundreds of CT restaurants statewide are well represented by fabulous CT craft beer. CRA Members proudly purchase, promote and sell CT Craft Beer to our guests on a daily basis.

As stated earlier, we support and successfully work within the boundaries of the 3 Tier System. Understanding that over time systems evolve, we expect those evolutions to be modest, reasonable and fair. We also believe that the notion of, “staying in your lane,” is a good thing. As an example of how the 3 Tier System works, I can share my particular scenario. As a holder of 3 Restaurant Liquor Permits, I cannot legally open up a Package Store. I cannot begin a Distribution Company, I cannot open an Import Company, and I cannot open a Brewery in CT. For the most part, current policy in place ensures clear distinctions and definitions when it comes to CT Liquor Permits. The CRA strongly supports SB 647s goal of clarifying Liquor Control Act, and having an honest discussion about what is reasonable, what is fair and what was the true legislative intent, when past exemptions and deviations to the 3 Tier System were given.

For this reason, and on behalf of our 155,000 employees, and our nearly 8000 restaurants, the CT Restaurant Association looks forward to continuing this conversation and maintaining a seat at the table in helping to shape CT liquor policy and working with this Committee and others on clarifying and carefully defining the available permits and the uses surrounding them.

Thank you again for your time today and I’m happy to answer any questions you may have.

